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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. RATA (New Zealand)
(Vice-Chairman)

later: Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan)
(Chairman)

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In the absence of Mr. Tshering (Bhutan), Mr. Rata (New Zealand), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 105: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (continued) (A/50/84-E/1995/12, A/50/114, A/50/156, A/50/163, A/50/181-E/1995/65, A/50/215-S/1995/475, A/50/254-S/1995/501, A/50/370, A/50/374, A/50/428-S/1995/787, A/50/454, A/50/473; A/CONF.166/8)

1. Ms. PRADA DE MESA (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that, because of its unique structure and its mandate to promote social justice, ILO had been given a special role in the follow-up to the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development with respect to employment. It was already taking steps to implement that mandate and to pursue the goal of full employment.

2. The goal of its work with the disabled was to promote equal treatment and opportunity in training and employment through standard-setting, technical cooperation and advisory services. So far, 51 countries had ratified the 1983 ILO Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons). In support of the principles outlined in that Convention, ILO had implemented technical programmes, including active contribution to the public debate on disability issues, development of research and support networks, vocational training and income-generating programmes. Training and employment programmes were currently under way for disabled citizens and ex-combatants in a number of countries striving to rebuild their economies in the aftermath of armed conflict.

3. With regard to older persons, ILO policy included prevention of age discrimination in employment, improved social protection, and the promotion of appropriate standards in respect of retirement and pensions. ILO technical programmes emphasized the need to give older people the opportunity to pursue work, retirement, or, if desired, a combination of the two. ILO provided assistance to Governments and other bodies in drafting the necessary legislation and setting up appropriate structures. It was striving to meet the priorities defined by the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development.

4. Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), recalling the importance of the objectives fixed by the World Summit, welcomed the agreement reached by the United Nations agencies to make a concerted effort to eliminate world poverty, the Summit's most compelling mandate. The agencies had agreed to strengthen their commitment to and collaboration for the goals established at the Summit, while keeping inter-agency mechanisms light and flexible and avoiding duplication. They had conceived four new inter-agency task forces, each geared towards one of the main Summit objectives. UNDP had been tasked to work with each task force, providing support to the resident coordinator system and utilizing its own programme resources to promote an integrated thrust in poverty elimination and to integrated assistance to

countries developing their anti-poverty strategies, and also to lead a working group on sustainable livelihoods for the poor.

5. The implementation of the Copenhagen agreements would be the primary objective of UNDP for the years ahead; there was a remarkable convergence between its objectives and the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. UNDP commitment to the advancement of women, the regeneration of natural resources and the provision of sustainable livelihoods for all were being brought increasingly within the framework of poverty elimination, the overriding objective of UNDP. A new resource-programming framework would facilitate greater flexibility in the allocation of UNDP resources, which were more than ever focused on poverty. A poverty elimination fund was being created, to be used primarily to assist countries in the preparation of national anti-poverty strategies agreed to at the Summit.

6. Resident representatives had been instructed to ensure that UNDP programmes focused on empowering people living in poverty, especially women, through participation and capacity development, and to support initiatives that would provide equitable access to productive assets and opportunities. They had been requested to ensure high leverage for limited UNDP resources in system-wide solutions, using the programme approach and seeking to build national capacities for policy development and programme implementation.

7. As a result of the Summit, the United Nations system had come together in an unprecedented way with a commitment to integrated follow-up.

8. Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakstan) said that her delegation, which had actively participated in the Copenhagen World Summit, supported the decision to hold a plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit during the anniversary session.

9. Her delegation supported the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the observance of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, which was the next important stage in the evolution of the United Nations programme on ageing. Kazakstan also supported United Nations activities to implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. In spite of the difficult transition to a market economy, her country was taking all measures to deal with the acute social problems that had arisen, including those affecting Kazakstan's three million older persons and disabled, and was establishing modern diagnostic and rehabilitation centres for the latter.

10. Her delegation fully supported the principles and goals of the Copenhagen Declaration, particularly in recognizing the family as the basic unit of society and acknowledging that it played a key role in social development and as such should be strengthened. Her Government was continuing to carry out far-reaching measures to provide social support to families with children and attached particular importance to assisting families and other groups living in ecologically damaged areas.

11. Kazakstan was currently drawing up a national programme to provide support to socially vulnerable population groups with the assistance of international organizations, which were providing invaluable aid in the social and economic

sphere. UNDP had provided assistance in drawing up the first draft of the national report on the human dimension, which would be used to carry out social programmes aimed at raising living standards and utilizing human potential.

12. In May 1995 the World Bank had approved Kazakstan's social-protection project, which would strengthen the capacity of the employment service in registering unemployed persons and providing unemployment benefits and training. That was the first such project of the World Bank in a member country of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In November 1994, her Government had signed an agreement on cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in order to find effective approaches to assisting children, mothers and other socially vulnerable groups.

13. Mr. AL-MAHMOUD (Qatar) said that the family was the basic building block of society. It was noticeable that crime, deviancy and social ills were less apparent in societies which had traditional family values than in those where the family system had disintegrated. The Islamic Shariah and the Qur'an provided important guidance in that respect. Families in Qatar were given every assistance, provided with social and health care and educational services in order to make its people fit for their responsibilities. Particular attention was paid to improving women's qualifications and increasing their participation in raising the standard of living of families. That was done through training centres and providing employment facilities and access to markets for women's output.

14. The 1994 International Year of the Family had given prominence to the national priorities which lay at the heart of family requirements. Foremost among those was achieving a balance between work and the responsibilities of family life. The family provided security and affection, taught children spiritual and moral values, linked the generations, passed on what was important and protected children from drug abuse and other ills.

15. That must be borne in mind when working to support the family, as must the fact that women had a vital role to play in social development. Qatar believed that social development was a goal which could safeguard human dignity, and that providing support for the family was the primary route for achieving that goal.

16. Mrs. GITTENS-JOSEPH (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the thirteen States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) which were Members of the United Nations, said that the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action represented a momentous step forward. The heads of Government of CARICOM had urged member States to examine the commitments and conclusions of the Summit with a view to implementation.

17. One of the social institutions which had been increasingly affected by the changing world environment was the family; that was particularly disturbing because the family represented the primary unit of society. It must be an integral part of development efforts, because it served as an agent of change. Recent widespread discussion of and action on family issues had sensitized the international community to the complex challenges facing families all over the world. In the Caribbean, as elsewhere, the family structure was not immune from economic and social pressures, or problems such as poverty, drug abuse and

domestic violence. For historical and sociological reasons, female-headed households were a common feature; that problem was compounded by the high incidence of unemployment and poverty among women in many Caribbean countries. Many programmes had been established in CARICOM countries to support the family unit.

18. Young people were also severely affected by world-wide political, social and economic developments, leading at times to feelings of frustration and alienation which in turn led to behaviour problems. The tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year provided an invaluable opportunity to reflect on the situation of young people. Youth unemployment was a major concern for many CARICOM States. In some countries as much as 70 per cent of the unemployed were under 30 years old. The plight of young men, who were increasingly endangered by the spread of AIDS, drug abuse and rising crime rates, and affected by educational and illiteracy problems, was a preoccupation in many countries. Another recent phenomenon was the emergence of street children, especially in urban areas. Faced with those problems, many countries had instituted innovative programmes for young people, working towards a society where young men and women would be empowered to develop their potential, creativity and skills.

19. To invest in youth was to invest in the future. It was significant that the United Nations would shortly be considering the adoption of the world programme of action for youth towards the year 2000 and beyond. In so doing, the international community would affirm its support and hope for youth, and consequently help to create a better world.

20. In many countries, older persons were experiencing isolation due to a lack of family support, diminished income and mobility and health problems. As their numbers increased, there was a greater demand for geriatric and health-care services, and a growing need to ensure their financial security. It was incumbent upon society to ensure that senior citizens enjoyed a dignified and meaningful life. Policies had been adopted in a number of CARICOM countries to improve the provision of pensions, health care and social assistance.

21. Issues pertaining to persons with disabilities were receiving increased attention in CARICOM member States, and steps were being taken to promote equality of opportunities for that important sector of the population. Those included special education and training facilities, efforts to improve mobility, and attempts to remove discriminatory employment practices. However, much more needed to be done to eliminate prejudice and facilitate full participation.

22. The complexity of social issues necessitated a holistic approach. At the national level it was important to encourage the involvement of the various interest groups, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. At the international level, it was imperative to provide sufficient resources for programmes in the field of social development. Member States of CARICOM were committed to supporting efforts to enhance social development throughout the world, which would result in improved human well-being and also enhance peace and stability. The goal of an improved world social situation should be a major priority of the international community.

23. Ms. KOVALSKA (Ukraine) said that poverty, unemployment and social disintegration were currently the most urgent social problems, especially in countries undergoing radical economic transformations. Having inherited from the Soviet Union a structurally deformed economy, Ukraine had a complicated task in establishing its statehood. In 1994 her Government had adopted new social reforms and an economic strategy aimed at the construction of a new economic system. The most important task was to establish efficient social protection for vulnerable categories of the population. Her Government was planning to set up a State committee to coordinate and reform the social-security and social-insurance system.

24. The social situation in Ukraine was further complicated by a sharp reduction in the birth rate, an increase in the death rate and the rapid ageing of the population. Her delegation supported the observance of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 and hoped that the measures taken within the framework of preparations for the Year would lead to common approaches to existing problems.

25. Caring for disabled persons was an important issue in her country. The adoption by the General Assembly of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities had been a major achievement. The main principles of the Rules were the basis for Ukraine's programmes for disabled persons. Her delegation supported the appointment of the Special Rapporteur on Disability to monitor implementation of the Rules.

26. Ukraine attached great importance to the development and adoption of the world programme of action concerning youth to the year 2000 and beyond, which would serve as a universal strategy to solve problems affecting young people. The United Nations system could make a valuable contribution to social development by supporting and coordinating national efforts. Her delegation strongly endorsed the proposal for the urgent adoption of a global United Nations programme to promote social transformation in countries with economies in transition. Vigorous international support was needed to set up effective social-protection systems in order to maintain stability in those countries.

27. Ms. SANTIPITAKS (Thailand) said that her country was deeply committed to achieving "a society for all" that included groups which had once been marginalized, particularly youth, older persons and persons with disabilities. Accordingly, Thailand supported the observance of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 and had already initiated a number of long-term measures to improve the health and well-being of older persons and enhance respect for them. A national committee of representatives from the public and private sectors made policy recommendations. The contribution by older persons to economic and social development should be recognized; Governments, international and non-governmental organizations should consider ways to provide them with occupational therapy, in addition to meeting their basic needs. Accordingly, Thailand supported the target laid down in the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/114) of establishing a global network of senior volunteers for social and economic development.

28. Her country also paid special attention to disabled persons by providing social services, educational programmes, health care, vocational centres and employment. The Government sought cooperation from the private sector to increase the hiring of the disabled by granting special tax incentives. Non-governmental organizations also played an important role by providing information and through fund-raising. Her country, which also attached great importance to the family as the basic unit of society, had established a subcommittee to follow up the 1994 International Year of the Family and enable families to care for children, older persons and the disabled.

29. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan) said that social development must be based on sustained economic growth and sustainable development. The foremost task was to make the economies of developing countries viable so that they could feed and clothe their people and provide them with health care and education. At the same time, the promotion and protection of human rights was necessary to ensure opportunities for the full development of the individual and society. Vigorous international support for national efforts was essential for development and peace. The current environmental crisis was mainly due to the unsustainable pattern of production and wasteful consumption.

30. The recommendations of the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development must be translated into concrete policies at both the national and international level. The support of the developed countries was essential, and a global policy for the eradication of poverty must be adopted. People living in situations of civil and ethnic strife were the most directly affected by social disintegration. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kashmir and many other parts of the world, the lives of millions of people have been disrupted. National and international mechanisms were needed to provide them with humanitarian assistance. Where conflicts had been resolved, the international community should promote peace through reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The process of disarmament and the transfer of resources from defence-oriented security to social security must be accelerated. The United Nations should play a more assertive role in defusing conflicts through mediation, arbitration, preventive diplomacy and peacemaking.

31. The developed countries must, without further delay, meet their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for official development assistance. That would be a great step towards solving social and economic problems in the developing countries. In addition to reallocating existing resources, additional resources for social development must be made available as agreed at the Copenhagen Summit. There was an urgent need to reduce the debt of low-income countries, decrease the multilateral debt burden of other developing countries and cancel the public debt of African countries and the least developed countries. The close involvement of the Bretton Woods institutions in the follow-up to the world conferences on population, social development and women would make structural-adjustment programmes socially sensitive and responsible. The link between poverty and unfavourable terms of trade was well established. Close international cooperation was required to improve market access for the developing countries and discourage protectionism. The United Nations should explore new ways to influence and regulate economic decision-making.

32. With support from various United Nations entities, the Asian Development Bank and many donor countries, and through larger budgetary allocations made possible by its economic reforms, Pakistan had launched a social action programme, at a cost of $8 billion, to address urgent needs in education, health, nutrition, water supply and sanitation. The main objectives were to eradicate poverty, redress gender inequities, promote rural development and protect the environment. In addition, the Government had identified the vulnerable groups that should benefit from social welfare and rehabilitation programmes. It was paying greater attention to the rights of women, children, religions and ethnic minorities and the poor.

33. Pakistan considered that the Commission for Social Development should be strengthened so that it could help implement the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, and that UNDP and ILO should support social development programmes in their respective areas of competence.

34. Mr. ARDA (Turkey) said that his country sought to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, exclusion and inequalities by instituting compulsory primary education, ensuring equal educational opportunities for both sexes and trying to provide primary health services to all, which were free of charge for those in need.

35. Turkey would be pleased to share its experience, gained through United Nations assistance programmes, in the field of social development. In fact, it already made substantial contributions to bilateral, regional and international initiatives by building hospitals and schools, providing technical assistance for economic activities, awarding scholarships and making cash donations to social institutions.

36. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action were valuable instruments for the realization of common goals. Social solidarity was, however, already a tradition in Turkey. For example, gender discrimination in education had been banned since the 1920s, and women were encouraged to participate in all spheres of social life. Turkey intended to use the world programme of action for youth to the year 2000 and beyond (E/1995/24) as a guide for national measures to benefit youth. It had actively observed the International Year of the Family and had contributed to the Voluntary Fund for the Year, and it planned to be equally active in observing the International Year of Older Persons. In that regard, it supported the draft resolution contained in document A/C.3/50/L.2.

37. Particularly in view of the increase in the number of disabled persons as a result of armed conflicts, Turkey attached great importance to the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. It supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on Disability, and had answered the latter's questionnaire. As a country that took a people-centred approach to development, Turkey was honoured to be the host of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), which would take place in Istanbul in 1996.

38. Ms. MIRBAHA (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that unfair international economic relations, widening economic disparities and international indifference to deprivation in developing countries were jeopardizing not only social development, but also international peace and security. In the process of enhancing social well-being, special attention must be paid to vulnerable groups.

39. As a country with a young population, Iran strove to promote young people's moral, educational, intellectual and physical development, and believed that the adoption of the world programme of action for youth to the year 2000 and beyond would focus more attention on youth problems. Likewise, Iranians felt that they had a religious, moral and social duty to care for the elderly, and the Government planned to include welfare programmes for the elderly in the country's second five-year development programme.

40. The Government had also made generous budgetary allocations to support vulnerable sectors of society and had adopted comprehensive measures to assist disabled persons, such as establishing vocational services and a vocational rehabilitation centre within the Ministry of Labour, holding workshops for disabled persons and setting aside 13 per cent of government administrative posts for disabled persons.

41. Since the economic situation of Iranian families had tended to deteriorate as a result of structural-adjustment programmes and external factors such as the war imposed on the country, the Government had taken steps to assist low-income families and planned to implement more measures under the second five-year programme. She hoped that all countries would work to promote family stability in order to safeguard human development and the future of mankind.

42. Mrs. NXUMALO (Swaziland) said that social development began with family development, since the family was the basic unit of society. The capacities and responsibilities of families must be used to address the problems of young, older and disabled persons.

43. Her country emphasized the provision of opportunities for young people to acquire skills that enabled them to engage in income-generating activities. The Government provided modest annual grants to various youth organizations through the Swaziland National Youth Council, whose officers were elected by the youth organizations themselves.

44. Swaziland was currently considering draft legislation on the training and employment of disabled persons and the establishment of a revolving-loan scheme for the disabled. People with disabilities who could not work received financial assistance, while those who could work received training at the ccuntry's vocational rehabilitation centre.

45. Her country welcomed the designation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons and supported the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (A/50/114). While institutions for the elderly were unacceptable in Swaziland, whose culture emphasized the role of older persons as decision-makers within the family, needy persons aged 65 and over could receive financial assistance from

the Government. In addition, public-awareness campaigns promoted respect for and assistance to the elderly at the family, neighbourhood and community levels.

46. Mr. WI Sok Yon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the World Summit for Social Development had highlighted the many economic and social problems stemming inter alia from inequitable international economic relations and armed conflicts. Social development policies should harness the capacities of the beneficiaries themselves. Moreover, since the social well-being of developed countries was closely linked to that of developing countries, the former should provide assistance to the latter for social development programmes and should fully honour their financial obligations under the various programmes of action adopted by the United Nations. Developing countries needed adequate financial and material resources, inter alia from international financial institutions, in order to implement international consensus agreements on social development.

47. Because of their vital role in promoting social development, young people received special attention in his Government's social programmes. His country also actively sought to safeguard the rights of disabled persons and to improve their situation.

48. All countries should implement the agreements reached at the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the United Nations system should help developing countries to secure technical assistance and financing for social development. His country was fully committed to those efforts.

49. Mr. Tshering (Bhutan) took the Chair.

50. Mr. KILO-ABI (Zaire) recalled that the participants in the World Summit for Social Development had pledged to promote a number of high ideals, such as social justice, tolerance, non-violence, non-discrimination and fairer income distribution. For the moment, however, the world suffered from a long list of ills, that threatened to undo the progress made in the area of social development.

51. Bipolarity in international relations and values had given way to economic globalization, under which a small élite enjoyed prosperity and many others pursued the race to acquire wealth, while the majority were condemned to a deadly cycle of inflation, rampant disease, runaway population growth and stringent structural-adjustment programmes.

52. A strategy should be worked out to deal with the emergence of global technological "apartheid", and the existence of isolated islands of opulence as well as regions of misery and deprivation, in order to make the economy serve society rather than the inverse.

53. His delegation welcomed the initiatives taken by the international community in order to increase life expectancy. In view of the large proportion of the world population which was ageing, it would be wise to emulate the encouraging initiatives being taken by older persons in some parts of the world, as well as to pay attention to those cultures which treated their ageing persons

61. A committee had been established to devise policies and provide support for the orphaned and widowed. A comprehensive plan guaranteed children all their rights, including health care. It was hoped to immunize every child by the year 2000; more than 85 per cent had already been immunized. By the year 2000, basic education, already compulsory, would be available to every child. Her country had also developed a national housing policy in order to provide suitable accommodation for all, and distributed clothing to all those in need.

62. Women were of central importance to the family and to society, and had been given special attention by her country. In the Sudan women constituted more than 50 per cent of civil service employees and 50 per cent of students in higher education, and also held important administrative and judicial posts.

63. Young people were considered central to the development effort, and their educational opportunities had been greatly increased by the opening of new regional universities and the provision of vocational training centres. Youth employment was supported and opportunities had increased. Vigorous efforts were being made to eradicate illiteracy.

64. Disabled persons were to be integrated as fully as possible into society. In the Sudan, they enjoyed all their rights without discrimination. As far as possible, given the constraints, the Government provided education and training in order to make them independent, and had established a centre for artificial limbs. Furthermore ageing persons were not a problem in the Sudan, since they were accorded special respect and were well looked after by their families.

65. Social development could not be achieved unless poverty were eradicated, moral values were upheld and social injustices and distinctions based on religion, race or culture were removed.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.